

Weathering The Storm

:: missions and the gospel ::

Tonight we will be discussing the Emerging Church's attitude towards missions and the Gospel, the Bible you have in your hands. Though we may think that these 2 subjects are somewhat separated, to the Emerging Church Movement they are connected in an important way.

Someone once said, "all truth is God's truth." And while that has become a recognizable quote for us, for the Emerging Church it has become a rule and a standard by which the Bible is approached and evangelism is conducted.

First, God's Word...

Within this movement the Bible is esteemed, referenced, discussed and utilized, but it is generally not believed to be inerrant from cover to cover. The authors and pastors within the Emerging Church speak of the Bible as offering some truth, some accuracy, but to many, it is not authoritative, or in some cases even foundational for Christians.

That's right, for many Emergents, the Bible is not the ultimate foundation of the Christian faith. As usual, it is difficult to get a substantive definition of what Emergents do believe about the Bible because their language is, as we've seen, almost always shrouded in existentialism, semantics and circular logic.

A few quotes that describe what I mean:

When asked during an interview 'is the Bible inerrant?' Author and Pastor Rick Warren stated, "I believe it's inerrant in what it claims to be. The Bible does not claim to be a scientific book in many areas."ⁱ

Popular author and Pastor Erwin McManus said in an interview: "Well, I build my life not on the Word of God, but the voice of God. The Scriptures are to me the instrument that God has placed in history for me to learn the voice of God. I treasure the Scriptures."ⁱⁱ

Just as we've seen before, the first look at the Emergent point of view doesn't seem too unusual, maybe even just a little bit off. But, as we continue to study the opinions and teachings of these men we find a disturbing set of beliefs.

Here are some examples:

Author and pastor Rob Bell comments on Paul's epistles and says, "we retained Jesus as Savior but promoted the apostle Paul (or someone else) to Lord and Teacher...and/or decided that Jesus' life and teachings were completely interpreted by Paul."ⁱⁱⁱ

Author and pastor Brian McLaren states that he no longer believes that the "Bible is absolutely equivalent to the phrase 'the Word of God' as used in the Bible." (That statement is quite ironic to me as he takes the phrase seriously, but not the book he found it in). "Although I do (he says) find the term inerrancy useful...I would prefer the word 'inherency' to describe my view of the Scripture." Meaning that the Bible contains the 'word of God' but is not the infallible, inerrant word of God.^{iv}

McLaren, esteemed by many as the father of the Emergent Church Movement, says, “what good is it, liberals would ask conservatives, to have an inerrant Bible if you have no inerrant interpretations?”^v

Rob Bell helps to clarify the Emergent stance on the Bible. He states that followers of Jesus are free to claim truth wherever we can find it.^{vi}

Within the Emerging Church there is no definition of what the Bible is. Like many of their practices there is an anything-goes, existential approach to God’s Word where no theories or individuals (other than conservative evangelicals like you and I) can be questioned and nothing can be answered.

The Emerging attitude about God’s Word keeps going:

Tony Jones, author and the National Coordinator of the Emergent Village, made waves when he wrote, “I think the Bible is a f***** scary book (pardon my French).”^{vii} On his blog, Jones writes that the Bible is a subversive text that should challenge every generational belief.

Rob Bell again – “the Bible itself...is a book that constantly must be wrestled with and re-interpreted.”^{viii} Bell dismisses the idea that Scripture alone will answer all questions. Bell writes that Jesus did not claim one religion is better than another when He said He was the way, the truth and the life, rather that His way is the way to the depth of reality.^{ix} As an aside, Rob Bell pastors a church of 10,000 members in Michigan and has sold over 750,000 copies of his short film series entitled *Nooma*.

Author and pastor Doug Pagitt, one of the foremost Emerging Leaders, said in a radio interview that he disagrees with “the concept of the depravity of man.”^x

Brian McLaren disagrees with the Biblical teaching of hell and Jesus’ death on the cross.^{xi}

Emergent author Steven Chalke writes about his disagreement with the Bible’s take on Jesus’ death on the cross when he said, “a dying Savior is no Savior,” and, “the church’s inability to shake off the great distortion of God contained in the theory of penal substitution...has cost us dearly.”^{xii}

Emergent pastor BJ Woodworth summed it up well when he said that, “we need to rediscover what it means to read the Bible existentially and experientially.”^{xiii}

The Emerging Church’s view of the Bible is stunningly different than our own. Their attitude towards God’s Word drastically affects their view of missions and evangelism.

Which brings us to Missions/Evangelism in the Emerging Church.

Brian McLaren – “...we place less emphasis on whose lineage, rites, doctrines, structures and terminology are right and more emphasis on whose actions, service, outreach, kindness and effectiveness are good.”^{xiv}

Rick Warren spoke of his plan for world missions and benevolence (known as the P.E.A.C.E. plan) – “There’s a man of peace in every village, in every government, in every business, in every church...When you find the man of peace, if he’s open and he’s willing to work with you, you bless him and you start your work there. The man of peace does not have to be a Christian believer. Could be Muslim. Could be Jewish. Because, when Jesus said, ‘find the man of peace’ *[in Matthew 10]* there were no Christians yet. Jesus hadn’t died on the cross. There was no resurrection. He’s just saying, go out and find somebody to work with.”^{xv}

McLaren again – “I don’t believe making disciples must equal making adherents to the Christian religion. It may be advisable in many (not all) circumstances to help people become followers of Jesus and remain within their Buddhist, Hindu or Jewish contexts.”^{xvi}

Leonard Sweet – “One can be a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ without denying the flickers of the sacred in followers of Yahweh, or Kali, or Krishna.”^{xvii}

Thomas Merton – “I see no contradiction between Buddhism and Christianity...I intend to become as good a Buddhist as I can.”^{xviii}

Rick Warren again – “I happen to know people who are followers of Christ in other religions.”^{xix}

There are many more quotes and writings we could reference to reveal to you the Emerging Church’s attitude toward the Bible, toward missions, toward the Christian calling. It may seem like a fringe group of liberal theologians to us, but the truth is that these Emergent leaders are pastoring churches of great size, often times in mainline denominations. Their books are studied as texts in major Christian universities. They are interviewed on CNN. Their influence is spreading and their ministries are growing.

This movement is raising up a generation that believes that truth is subjective, the Bible is (at best) open to interpretation and people like us are damaging to what God would really like to be doing on the earth.

Rob Bell pointed out the Emergent Attitude towards people who might be critical of this movement when he said that he wonders “whether that person is a Christian.”^{xx}

When you get right down to it, in the Emerging Church Movement there is only 1 group that isn’t invited to the party: conservative, evangelical Christians who believe in an inerrant, inspired, authoritative Bible.

We should love these people, we should pray for their churches, we should show them the same grace that God showed us, but we must also educate ourselves and ground ourselves in the Rock of Christ Jesus, who said:

John 5.24 – Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent me has everlasting life.

Matthew 24.35 – Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.

If we ground ourselves on God’s Word we will be able to weather any storm.

ⁱ msnbc.com | ‘God Debate: Sam Harris vs. Rick Warren’

ⁱⁱ Relevant Magazine | ‘In That Smoky Room’

ⁱⁱⁱ svchapel.org | ‘The Emerging Church part 3’

^{iv} ibid.

^v *ibid.*

^{vi} beliefnet.com | 'Velvet Elvis' Author Encourages Exploration Of Doubt'

^{vii} churchandpomo.typepad.com | 'Why Is The Emerging Church Drawn To Deconstructive Theology?'

^{viii} beliefnet.com | 'Velvet Elvis' Author Encourages Exploration Of Doubt'

^{ix} *ibid.*

^x crosstalkamerica.com | 'Emerging Church Confusion'

^{xi} Faith Undone

^{xii} appraising.org | '" Evangelicals"' Attacking The Atonement'

^{xiii} appraising.org | 'Emerging With A Christian View Of Scripture'

^{xiv} svchapel.org | 'The Emerging Church part 3'

^{xv} Faith Undone pg 150

^{xvi} Faith Undone pg 173

^{xvii} Faith Undone pg 179

^{xviii} *ibid.*

^{xix} *ibid.*

^{xx} abpnews.com | 'Christians Shouldn' t Fear Controversy Over Doctrine'